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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARAMARIBO 000117

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL MARR NS
SUBJECT: MILITARY OFFICER VOICES PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR AN
ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR BARNES FOR REASON 1.5 B AND D.

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Summary. During a February 7 press "Information Day" hosted by Suriname's National Army, a military officer, Major Goerdeyal, called on the Surinamese Government to sign an Article 98 agreement with the United States or face losing US military assistance. Goerdeyal declared that the days of the military coup were over and that every member of the Surinamese Armed Forces from the first day of recruit training is made to understand that the armed forces serve under the civilian leadership of the country. He also announced that the GOS was implementing a plan to reinstate a national service program in response to the military threat posed by Guyana. His remarks were widely reported by journalists. Surinamese President Venetiaan was reportedly extremely irritated by Goerdeyal's public comments, so much so that he appended his speech to the annual Diplomatic New Year's luncheon to remind the military that the Surinamese Army is subordinate to the civil authorities. However well intentioned, Goerdeyal's statements have made our achieving an Article 98 agreement with Suriname all the more difficult. End Summary.

ARTICLE 98

¶12. (U) During a specially organized "Information Day" for the press February 6, Major Pertapsingh Goerdeyal, the head of Suriname's Armed Forces (SAF) training and operations division, voiced strong support for an Article 98 agreement between Suriname and the United States. According to local media reports, Goerdeyal warned that Suriname would lose all the assistance that it currently received from SOUTHCOP if it joined the ICC but failed to sign an Article 98 agreement. Noting that SOUTHCOP was currently the SAF's largest donor and the only entity that trained Surinamese military personnel abroad, he stressed it was in Suriname's "highest interest" that cooperation between SOUTHCOP and the SAF continue. Goerdeyal added that it was unclear what the GOS decision on Article 98 would be but that time was running out. The signing of an Article 98 agreement will be discussed, Goerdeyal said, when Minister of Defense Assen meets with senior SOUTHCOP officials at SOUTHCOP headquarters in less than two weeks.

¶13. (U) Goerdayal told the press, "the US military attache has told us that, if Suriname signs up to the ICC but not to an Article 98 agreement, then within 24 hours he must close his office, depart and all projects will stop." (Comment: No such statement has ever been made by the DATT's office in Paramaribo. End Comment.) Goerdeyal added, however, that, as a clear incentive, SOUTHCOP has made available a USD 1.6 project for the SAF that Suriname can claim if it signs an Article 98 agreement. He explained that Guyana was already making use of a similar incentive project. Having already signed an Article 98 agreement, Guyana enjoys generous support from SOUTHCOP, he claimed. (Comment. Again, sources for these statements are unknown. End Comment.)

¶14. (U) Building the case for an agreement, Goerdeyal highlighted the joint activities that will be carried out by SOUTHCOP and the SAF this year, including:

-- The SAF and SOUTHCOP will participate in two Medical Readiness Exercises, one in April and the other in May, which would result in free medical treatment to 12,000 needy Surinamers.

-- The SAF will receive training via the International Military and Education Training (IMET) Programs as well as a first responder medical training to help the SAF fulfill its newly extended mandate, including emergency assistance coordination.

-- Suriname will participate in a Joint Command Exercise Training (JCET). During an October 2003 JCET, fifty military personnel and ten police officers received special anti-terrorism training. Goerdeyal deemed JCETs particularly useful since they provide Surinamese military personnel with the newest tactical and technical tools.

-- SOUTHCOM has made available 400,000 USD in humanitarian assistance through the Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP).

15. (U) In addition, Goerdeyel announced that as a sign of solidarity between the two nations, SOUTHCOM had invited Suriname to participate in the Trade Winds Exercise, which will take place April 7-17, 2004, in the Dominican Republic.

16. (U) To counter concerns that Americans accused of committing a war crime might somehow escape justice via an Article 98 agreement, Goerdeyel laid out the legal framework underlying such an agreement. He explained that under an Article 98 agreement, American citizens, including military personnel, would be tried either in the country where the crime allegedly occurred or in the United States but not in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

17. (U) In other matters, Goerdeyel stated:

-- The days of military coups in Suriname have passed for good. "The chance that the military would ever take over via a coup is small." All recruits and all members of the armed forces learn from day one that they serve under the civilian leadership of the country.

-- The Surinamese Army recently received applications from 1,700 young men and women for 200 positions within the Armed Forces.

-- The Surinamese Government is implementing a plan to reinstate national service. Among other reasons, this is being done in response to the military threat posed by Guyana.

DISAVOWAL

18. (C) Goerdeyel's comments reportedly infuriated Surinamese President Venetiaan, who called in his top military officials over the weekend to file a report on Geordeyel's remarks, which he reportedly characterized as military leadership meddling in political matters. Both Ministry of Defense Chief of Staff Justice Hew a Kie and Suriname Armed Forces CHOD Ernest Mercuru told the Embassy privately on February 9 that, in their reports to Venetiaan, they disavowed Goerdeyel's remarks. They stressed that the SAF did not seek to publicly pressure the GOS to decide one way or the other on signing an Article 98 agreement. (Comment. Although they have consistently made clear to DATT that they favor such an agreement, they recognized it as a political decision. End Comment.) They both regretted Goerdeyel's statement about "coups" as unnecessary and unfortunate. They also rejected his assertion that there was any plan in place to resurrect a national service program, although they admitted that Minister of Defense Assen had stated that such a plan might be developed sometime this year. But, they stressed, the national service plan has nothing to do with any supposed military threats from Guyana.

VENETIAAN

110. (U) For his part, President Venetiaan added a comment to the end of his prepared speech on the occasion of his New Year's luncheon for the Diplomatic Corps February 9, in which he stated: "We feel a need to stress the importance of democracy in Suriname and in particular the rule that in Suriname the army is subordinated to the civil authority in the country. This should not be jeopardized in any way."

COMMENT

111. (C) The sources for many of Geordeyel's Article 98 declarations, including his claims of promised SOUTHCOM support, are unclear. The swift reaction by Suriname's President to Goerdeyel's worrisome statements demonstrates the heightened sensitivity to any overstepping of bounds by the military given Suriname's muddled past with military regimes. Despite Goerdeyel's best intentions, the

statements may have adverse effects on our continuing efforts to secure an Article 98 agreement with Suriname.
END COMMENT.

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